

Prepared remarks
of
Stephen A. Owens
Director, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
before the
Arizona House of Representatives Environment Committee
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Chairman Hart, Vice Chairman Rosati and members of the House Environment Committee, good afternoon. For the record, I am Steve Owens, Director of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. I am very pleased to appear before the Committee today to provide a brief overview of the department's priority issues.

I am accompanied today by the department's four division directors: Nancy Wrona, Director of our Air Quality Division; Shannon Davis, Director of our Waste Programs Division; Karen Smith, Director of our Water Quality Division; and Bob Rocha, Director of our Administrative Services Division. Also with me today are the Department's Deputy Director, Patrick Cunningham; Jim Buster, the department's legislative affairs director; and Ric Tobin, who serves as Counselor to the Director. As you may know, Ric previously served for several months as the department's Acting Director, and prior to that was Deputy Director. I am extremely pleased that Ric agreed to my request to stay on at ADEQ as my counselor.

In a moment, I will ask the division directors to provide the Committee with highlights of their activities. First, though, I'd like to say a few words about the department.

I was honored when Governor Napolitano nominated me to serve as ADEQ Director beginning on January 6th of this year. For the last fourteen years before January 6, I was an attorney in private law practice here in Arizona. I have represented business clients of all shapes and sizes in a wide range of environmental matters. Over the years, my clients have included high technology companies, communications companies, mining companies, banks and financial institutions and others. My experience in private practice has given me an important perspective on the need for pragmatic, common sense approaches to environmental regulations, as well as on the need for consensus in solving environmental problems.

I believe that we must build on the progress ADEQ has made in recent years in being more responsive to the needs of its customers. I also believe that we must expand ADEQ's outreach efforts and improve our relationships (and lines of communication) with elected officials throughout our state, especially at the local and county levels.

I am committed to working closely with the Legislature in a bipartisan way to find a balanced approach to protect public health and the environment for all of our citizens. I also will draw upon my background and experience in Washington to be a strong advocate for Arizona with the federal agencies that provide ADEQ with funding.

As you may know, the department was created when the Arizona Legislature passed the Environmental Quality Act in 1986. The department's goal since that time has been to increase the effectiveness,

efficiency and public acceptance of environmental regulation as a means of protecting public health and the environment for Arizona citizens.

In the three short weeks I have been on the job as ADEQ Director, I have learned a great deal about the progress made in recent years by the department under my predecessors and the talented leadership team here with me today.

Inside the information packets you have been provided, we have included a summary of the department's Performance Objectives (Sunset Measures) Report, which was delivered to the Legislative Committee of Reference last session. While our division directors will provide highlights of that report in their presentations, I would like to point out several accomplishments that I think are important indicators of the department's commitment to improving our environment across a range of programs.

First, and perhaps most important to our citizens, Arizona's air is cleaner today than it was six years ago. As a result of measures implemented in partnership with other agencies to control air pollution in the Phoenix metropolitan area since the mid-1990s, Arizona so far has been able to meet federal air quality standards for ozone and carbon monoxide, two of the most common and harmful air pollutants in urban environments. Meeting the federal government's new, more stringent 8-hour standard for ground-level ozone pollution presents ADEQ and our state with new challenges.

Another of the department's success stories is the assistance we are providing to the state's small water systems to help them comply with the federal government's new standard for arsenic in drinking water. As you may know, the new federal standard requires public water systems to lower the concentration of arsenic in their drinking water from 50 parts per million to 10 by January 2006. ADEQ has taken the lead on developing a master plan that will provide each of these small systems with the lowest-cost options for compliance.

Our Waste Programs Division has initiated clean-up activities at a number of contaminated waste sites across our state. Since 1997, ADEQ's Water Quality Assurance Revolving Fund (or WQARF) program has implemented nine early response actions to immediately clean up sites in Payson, Quartzite, Tucson, Phoenix, Yuma and Globe/Miami.

Sustaining the department's momentum in these and other areas as we face one of the worst budget situations in our state's history presents us with significant challenges.

Rather than putting forward legislative initiatives this session, the department will be seeking your support for a handful of minor common sense, no-cost corrections to existing laws, while putting our major focus on maintaining progress in existing programs. For example, even as we face substantially limited resources, we must continue to work to improve air quality in our state. Governor Napolitano is particularly concerned about children's environmental health and the effects of air pollution on children's respiratory illnesses such as asthma.

We also must implement the new AZPDES program, under which Arizona now has full authority to issue water quality discharge permits in place of EPA, which will be of major benefit to Arizona businesses and communities. We must continue making progress in cleaning up sites in Arizona that threaten public health or the environment, and keep improving our Underground Storage Tank program and the State Assurance Fund.

We must continue to address environmental challenges along our border with Mexico. And, we must increase the department's public outreach efforts.

In the past few weeks, I already have met and spoken with a number of business groups, community leaders and elected officials interested in the department's programs and policies. I believe strongly in open communications, and I intend to continue listening to a wide variety of people and groups throughout the state. I am convinced that by enhancing relationships with the business community, as well as governmental, community, environmental and other stakeholder groups, we can and will find ways to be more responsive and efficient in serving the needs of Arizona's citizens.

That concludes my prepared remarks. Our division directors will now make their brief presentations about specific program priorities, and we then will be pleased to answer your questions.

(At the conclusion of division presentations:)

As all of you are well aware, the state's budget situation will overshadow most everything that we do in the coming months. As such, it is very important that we work together in these challenging times.

My intent as ADEQ Director is to sustain the progress we have made in recent years, while enhancing our outreach and community involvement activities.

I appreciate the Committee's support of the department's efforts, and I look forward to working with each of you and the other Members of the Legislature.

If my staff or I can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to call me. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear here today.